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In Support of SB 1178: AN ACT EXPANDING CONNECTICUT PAID SICK DAYS

Good Evening Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, and members of the Committee, my name is Israel Alvarado and I am a PCA in Meriden.

I've been a PCA home care provider for 5 years, both in Pennsylvania and now here in Connecticut. I love the work I do because I truly enjoy caring for others and I am good at it. I've become a kind of troubleshooter because I can de-escalate situations with very behavioral consumers. Every day, my goal is to make the world of my consumer a little better, a step closer to normalcy and independence.

In Pennsylvania, I qualified for Medicaid. I relocated with my family to Connecticut for a better way of living, but because I make a dollar or two more an hour as a PCA here, I don't qualify for Medicaid here. I have no health insurance, which means I'm stuck in a never-ending cycle between a rock and a hard place. Additionally, PCAs like me are not included in the state's sick leave laws, which means not only can I not get sick because I can't afford the doctor when I am sick, but I also can't take time off to care for myself when I do get sick because it means I will miss a day of pay and I cannot afford that.

Two years ago, I had a heart attack. I had tapped out all my resources to pay for my heart medications, but I still had to ration them week to week – one week I take one, the next week another. I pay for what I can afford and go without the rest. On top of that financial burden I had to take time off with no pay. Then in December of 2021, I got COVID. I was out for 3 and a half weeks with no pay. When we won our new Union contract last spring, I was pleased that we won our first-ever paid time off benefit. We were promised 5 days per year for full-time workers. BUT almost a year later, the State of CT has not yet implemented a system for us to use this benefit.

We either stop work and live off the system, or we work 2-3 jobs to make ends meet. At the end of the day all we're trying to do is survive. That's why SB 1178 is so important! With paid sick days, PCAs like me can miss work when we are ill without risking a financial crisis. As professional caregivers, we deserve to be able to take time to care for ourselves. Please pass SB 1178. Thank you for your time.